

Journal of the American Society of Professional Graphologists

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1. To present theoretical and research papers in scientific graphology according to traditional academic standards.
2. To create a forum for helping graphology gain a wider academic and professional audience in America.
3. To interface with the international professional graphological community.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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ALCOHOLISM AND HANDWRITING

Thea Stein Lewinson

Translated by Robert Wall

ABSTRACT

This is a preliminary study based upon handwritings from Alcoholics Anonymous. The author found common characteristics associated with extremes in upper and lower zonal lengths, in breadth of letters, as well as disturbed rhythm of distribution and other factors. The handwriting samples based on material obtained before and after the drinking period illustrates a disturbed, sensitive self-image. Handwriting analysis provides a unique means for demonstrating the development of conditions during the course of this disease.

PROLOGUE

Alcoholism and handwriting is an unusually difficult topic. The best proof of this is that there is virtually no literature about it; at any rate, I have been unable to find any in America. Nothing on this topic has appeared in any of the German journals in the last five years. A colleague in New York kindly sent me some handwritings of alcoholics and wrote: "If you can find something in common in these samples... please inform me. I can find nothing." As mentioned, the problem is not so simple.

I work in Washington with a psychotherapist, Dr. J. Martin Keehner, who specializes in alcoholism and drug addiction, and is in close cooperation with Alcoholics Anonymous. He provided me not only with script material, but also with items of information about alcoholism, which are absolutely essential for the understanding of these scripts. I must ask, therefore, that you show some patience with me, if I discuss something of alcoholism in its latest concept before I move on to the analysis of the handwriting samples. However, I should like to say something in anticipation.

1. The handwriting examples are so diverse in form that it appears impossible to find something in common.
2. The handwriting examples often deteriorate to such a high degree during the period of acute alcoholism that one can scarcely find anything characteristic in them.

Through Alcoholics Anonymous we work principally with recuperating alcoholics, from whom we obtain examples of handwriting. These examples show self-renovating, almost born-again forms, in which some things in common can be recognized. This was especially the case when we received examples of handwriting from the period before the onset of alcoholism. This was particularly informative

with reference to the *writing of recuperating alcoholics*, as the latter reveals personal characteristics which possibly indicate things which they have in common.

Of course, handwriting is once again the best medium to show developments. We have sufficient examples of handwriting to draw tentative conclusions, whereas it would not be sufficient for statistical research. We were able to establish a tentative graphic syndrome which will possibly undergo still further modifications in the future. It is interesting to see that we are apparently dealing with extremes, and a change from one extreme to another in these samples.

Now for some facts about alcoholism. Alcoholism is a constitutional disease like diabetes and requires special treatment. But in contrast to other specific diseases there are a conglomerate of aspects which have to be taken into consideration. These include the organic, emotional, social and mental aspects of the personality.

The chemical substance ethyl alcohol is not adequately metabolised in alcoholics, and this special condition may be inherited. The hypothesis is that not all persons who inherit this condition become alcoholics. We believe that the emotionally disturbed and the emotionally immature resort to alcohol when placed under stress and in a crisis in order to cope with life. (Other people with different conditions become psychotic or develop an organic illness, etc.). Alcoholics are the people who become physically and psychologically addicted, and the removal of the physical addiction alone does not lead to a complete cure. The examples of handwriting will illustrate this point, later.

Dr Keehner has kindly placed at our disposal the following declarations about alcoholism:

INTRODUCTION

Today there is perhaps no other harmful condition which affects so many people, the origin and explanation of which is more argued about than alcoholism. Tragically, alcoholism has been and continues to be most often basically misunderstood. The Roman philosopher Seneca expressed the following opinion: "Alcoholism is nothing other than a deliberately accepted condition of mental illness." Even today the alcoholic is regarded as a dubious character or someone who has a moral problem.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the dynamic aspects of the disease and to explain the psychological tendencies by analysis of the handwriting. This should serve as a support and an aid when writing a basic and all-embracing description of alcoholism. It is to be hoped that this will lead to a more effective treatment of the illness.

HISTORY

The consumption of beer and wine dates back to 3,000 B.C., but distillation was not discovered until 800 B.C. And this is the process by which the strongly effective alcoholic drinks are produced which today are for sale in ever increasing quantities. It has been estimated that in the United States 100 million people drink alcohol and that there are approximately 20 million alcoholics (plenty of scope here for research into handwriting!).

In the last ten years there has been a considerable increase in alcoholism in young people, and also alcoholism is rising in women (Davidson and Neale, 1982). The number of suicides amongst alcoholics is also much higher than in the rest of the population. One third of the remaining suicides had alcohol as a contributory factor. According to some estimates the consumption of alcohol is also a contributory factor in at least 25,000 fatal accidents on the motorways. And, it appears that more than half the number of murders are committed under the influence of alcohol.

In the USA alcoholism is listed as the second most common cause of death. The annual cost to the economy amounts to tens of millions of dollars, but the sum granted annually towards research amounts to approximately 9 cents per patient. Until 1935, when Alcoholics Anonymous was founded, alcoholics either died or were committed to mental institutions... and even today not all alcoholics are rehabilitated; most have to arrive at a state of complete confusion before they seek and undergo suitable treatment.

Carl Gustav Jung said to one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, "You have the mental constitution of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen a single case reproduced in which this mental constitution exists to such a high degree as in yours. Yes, exceptions to cases like yours have occurred - twice in the past."

Now and again alcoholics have had so-called religious experiences. They appear to be unusual phenomena as significant emotional displacements and new cognitive arrangements. Ideas, emotions and attitudes which were the main focus in life of these people are suddenly sacrificed and a completely new group of attitudes and motives begin to rule them.

The Alcoholics Anonymous organization has spread over the whole world so now there are millions of recuperating alcoholics. The Medical Association has declared alcoholism a disease, treatment centers have been founded, but the number of relapses is still very large. In the opinion of Dr. Keehner it is partly due to the lack of an understanding, comprehensive treatment. And the reason for that is partially the shortage of a basic theoretical understanding of the disease. This is where handwriting analysis can be supportive.

In the attempt to understand alcoholism a distinction must be made between the conditions which have driven people to drink, and conditions which develop into addiction. An alcoholic who can not after all give up drinking does not explain why that person actually began the habit in the first place. Those who wish to describe alcoholism, usually do it with either psychological or physiological theories.

THEORIES

Most psychoanalytical explanations point to the main cause as a fixation on the oral level. Another psychoanalyst's opinion regards excessive drinking as a defensive mechanism designed to diminish the emotional conflicts or a deep-lying guilt. The theory-formers of the learning method regard excessive drinking as a means of lowering stress and as an acquired reaction, which is developed and maintained because it reduces stress.

As alcoholism is a physiological conditioned addiction, some theorists attempt to point to physiological factors as to why some people develop a drinking habit which leads finally to alcoholism.

From these theories one can deduce two clear definitions; one behavioral and one physiological. Davidson describes alcoholism as a disruption of behavior characterized by continued and excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks, which impairs not only health, but also social and business functions, and creates a physiological dependence on alcohol. On the other hand, Mullan, also a psychologist, describes alcoholism as a chronic mainly inherited disease, which gradually continues from an early physiological susceptibility into an addiction, characterized by changes in the ability to resist physiological dependence and by the loss of control over the habit of drinking. The psychological symptoms are only secondary compared with the physiological image of the illness and have no importance for the beginning of the illness.

If we now look at the strongly contrasting definitions of alcoholism then one can understand why there is such a large discrepancy in the treatment of alcoholics. Perhaps one can also understand why we find such a large number of relapses. One thing is certain - that is that Alcoholics Anonymous is successful in helping many alcoholics recover. They combine the *physiological and psychological* definitions by defining alcoholism as a compulsive behavior and as a physical ailment; but they emphasize more in the mind than in the body, and that often a spiritual or religious awakening takes place prior to the cure.

HYPOTHESIS

1. The handwriting of alcoholics should show characteristically distinctive peculiarities. The interpretation of these peculiarities could perhaps contribute towards explaining tendencies which turn an individual to drink and ultimately lead him to complete dependence on alcohol.
2. The handwriting of a recuperating alcoholic should show that the originally discovered peculiarities become not so predominant and possibly more modified.

METHODS

Handwriting is one of the few methods with which one can undertake longitudinal studies relating to personality and attitudes of a person. Handwriting appears especially suited to studies regarding the personality structure of the alcoholic. For example, an examination can be made of the premorbid personality which can show that certain tendencies do exist which may undergo a characteristic change during and after the outbreak of the illness. As already mentioned our material is not very plentiful and therefore we wish to describe this study as merely an exploratory investigation. We can, however, establish hypothetically some common tendencies and demonstrate characteristic developments.

GRAPHOLOGICAL SECTION

At this point I should like to mention in advance that we are dealing, psychologically speaking, with a disturbed self-image or with a disturbed self-assessment. Therefore I should like to indicate the graphological characteristics which relate to the Ego or the self. These include:

1. The height of the middle zone as an expression of self-importance. This serves as the standard for all other characteristics.
2. The breadth or the narrowness of the letters which portray the feelings of self-confidence.
3. The relationship of the upper and lower lengths in relation to the middle zone portray the strength of personal endeavor and the degree of personal ambition — how much or how little the writer reaches out and projects himself into the world.

In the distribution of his writing over the writing surface a person uses a lot of space or a little space — in other words, the relationship of the person to his environment, which can be harmonious or disturbed.

Furthermore we examined the qualities of the stroke for the basic disposition or substances of a person, and of course the rhythm and its interruptions of the written image as a whole which provides us with the answers about the dynamism of the personality. As you will see, and as I have already mentioned, we are dealing here mainly with extremes and the change to extremes.

At first glance the handwriting material looks just as variegated as the psychic problems with which the psychotherapist is confronted in his first appointment in that it appears almost impossible to discover something in common. At first we found that there were apparently extremes in the middle zone of the handwriting — either very large or very small middle zones, or an alternation between both extremes. Furthermore, we discovered that in the same situation the relationship between the upper and lower lengths is also emphasized as small or large. Here we have a handle; the middle zone is the realm of the Ego or of the “I”.

muslim curators, mostly. Lately
 we sense of a loss of who I
 appeared to the nature of things
 my relationships with my family.
 am, but sometimes not why!

1. Male, 40 years. Narrowed letters and extremely tension evident.

So sorry to hear you are having
 some trouble in your house. Edg Wip
 told me about the pipes etc
 Sorry I wasn't around to help you
 I know it has been very cold there

2. Disintegration of middle zone.

see anyone suffer, or hurt
 they are to either help
 maybe they'll like me
 in a people pleaser. I'd
 to really love someone -

3. Male, 36 years. Large wide letters.

Abb. 3: Männlich, 36 Jahre, große Buchstabenbreite

upset ever see his serious
 he seems to always be happy
 pissed me off, cause it
 that no one can be happy
 the time, he doesn't like
 to be liked. he seems to want
 what people don't like about
 n. whether this is, so he can improve.
 or not I don't know

4. An example of disturbed rhythm of distribution.

In most methods of graphology the middle zone is the kernel of the script which expresses the hub of the personality. In the measuring methods usually the standard measure of all other characteristics is related to the middle zone. If we now find extremes in this basic characteristic then we must accept that there is evidence of a basic disturbance, which apparently affects the nucleus of the personality. Likewise, we can also accept that the level of expectation of these writers moves from one extreme to another — either very tiny and slack, or exaggerated and tense. And this slackness or tenseness can also be imparted by the stroke.

The disturbed Ego with its unequal writings — at any rate, is found in most of them. Hence the different effects now affect the handwriting. Most of these writers choose lined paper, apparently in order to find a support for their otherwise very disturbed writings. Nevertheless, one can notice that the rhythm of distribution of the words not only often illustrate extremes, but also strong irregularities. These can show that the conception of harmony and proportion is disturbed.

The writer has no sense of order, distribution or harmony. It can be conceived therefore that a person lacking this balance has a particular disposition for moving to extremes - or alternatively to excesses.

The next characteristic of interest in these specimens of handwriting is the breadth of the letters. Usually we find a mixture of very narrow (covered letters) and very broad, often almost inflated letters, and very strong contrasts as well. As the breadth of the letters basically expresses the strength of a person's self-confidence, we also find stress between feelings of inferiority and considerable self-esteem. Of course, many men have fluctuations in their self-esteem, but these discrepancies in such an outspoken measure make it understandable that there exist here great possibilities for problems with the environment. Either these people wish to withdraw from their surroundings and isolate themselves, or they push themselves without reserve to the forefront and assert themselves.

A characteristic, apparently common to all these writings is the thin stroke (apart from in the not readily discernible writings which are written with a felt pen). One could say that the stroke shows the quality of the substance of a person in the sense of the degree of his powers of resistance, especially in the psychic sense. The thin stroke portrays the sensitivity and vulnerability of a person, which he can alter during the course of his life, either consciously or unconsciously.

Sensitivity can be used artistically by some, while others attempt to protect themselves by other ways and means in order to negate it, as for example the alcoholic for whom alcohol represents a protection and a safety valve. Here in the thin stroke, which expresses not only basic sensitivity but also over sensitivity, we may possibly have one of the main causes for the difficulties experienced by these people and their search for means to overcome their discomfort.

The characteristics mentioned here can be regarded as common factors running through the handwritten material, although all of these characteristics will not always appear at the same time in all of the material. The remaining handwriting

characteristics very as in all average specimens of handwriting, especially in their formations. We find individual shapes, printed letters and naturally many school-taught shapes. This is where perhaps one of the difficulties in the interpretation of the handwritings of alcoholics lies.

We find no characteristic shape and the graphologist usually relies on the shape of the letters as a distinctive characteristic. The tension of the stroke changes from the greatest intensity to the greatest slackness, also in extremes. As lined paper is normally used, one can say nothing definite about the directions or the fluctuations of the lines. Fluidity to the left or the right would naturally follow the chosen letter types and does not show any special common tendencies. Perhaps we will find something characteristic in the degree of inter-relationships.

We find a lack of dominating inter-relationships not only in the printed scripts, and likewise we often find complete inter-relationships. So one could describe the degree of inter-relationships as a secondary common characteristic in the writings of alcoholics. If one chose the emotional interpretation of this characteristic, then one could say that these people either live as isolated and withdrawn from society or that they project themselves in society in the same way with no outside contacts, in order to find relief for their discomfort.

The strength and direction of pressure varies greatly, so that here also no common factors can be established. What might be of significance, however, is that we cannot at any rate observe in these specimens any extreme pressure strengths. These are specimens provided by people from a middle class and educated level, who are partly even in a higher category. In a more primitive stratum the pressure of the writing could possibly show a stronger form of expression, and that in itself would also be the case during a period of alcoholism.

As a result of the above observations we can now experimentally draw up a graphic syndrome for the handwritings of these recuperating alcoholics:

PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS

1. Extremes in the height of the middle zone.
2. Extremes in the extension of the upper and lower lengths
(usually upper lengths are smaller than lower lengths).
3. Disturbed rhythm of distribution.
4. Extremes in the breath of letters.
5. A thin stroke.
6. A tense or slack stroke (disturbed basic rhythm).

SECONDARY CHARACTERISTICS

7. Extremes in the degree of inter-relationships.

It goes without saying that we find disturbances of rhythm in this material from a small to a large degree. Nevertheless, we can find a few specimens with comparatively good rhythm. If we wish to interpret this syndrome, we could say that

these alcoholics have a disturbed personality nucleus (namely the Ego or the "I"), and this disturbance influences its actions and reactions. Either he is over ambitious and wants to accomplish more than he is capable of doing, or he withdraws, has no special ambitions and retreats to his own atmosphere.

There is an English expression, "He is either an over-achiever or an under-achiever." These people are either overambitious or completely indifferent when it comes to their accomplishments and goals. Great sensitivity allows these people to react strongly to their surroundings and they introduce various methods to protect themselves from harm.

These methods may not always be calculated, as their rational judgement is disturbed. The disturbance to the Ego causes an inferiority feeling as well as a feeling of excessive self-importance. In other words there is a lack of balance in the feelings of self-confidence. Such a person is under great tension and without any doubt he must experience difficulties with the people in his surroundings, especially those in his close vicinity.

Most of these people (at any rate in the material that we examined) as far as talent is concerned have a high intelligence, only they do not use it in a suitable way. It is true that they have control over themselves, but they feel very uncomfortable and are full of anxieties. Apparently, the desire to lose this control and to be free of unsettling feelings is one of the basic motives for alcoholism.

Our inclusive graphic syndrome takes into consideration the essential aspects of personality more so than the external formations. Perhaps it explains the complexities and variations of the handwriting material just as much as the various differences of the people who become alcoholics.

Although we had a limited population, we were able to obtain samples of these vulnerable and recuperating alcoholics dating from a time before they began to drink. This material was strongly informative as you shall see.

These scripts showed an over-strong regularity (you could say discipline) in almost all parts of the written image which often gave a feeling of being too rigid. Apparently all these people grew up under the influence of an over-strong super-ego or a very strong discipline. It was a compulsion, which they had to break through as soon as possible (in a crisis) and apparently by drastic ways and means, namely by drink.

One could raise the objection that many people grow up under the domination of a strong super-ego and that they do not all become alcoholics. But that appears to be exactly the crux of the matter. People with the above mentioned physiological condition and exaggerated sensitivity, whose self-feeling and self-esteem was destroyed, became alcoholics under stress. These are all our preliminary results. The development appears to lead from the regularity of handwriting to chaos and finally back to rebuilding.

During the period of heaviest drinking the handwriting naturally disintegrates in very different ways and to very different degrees. That is understandable, and everyone can see from his own handwriting what happens when he drinks a lot of

ears, I drank socially & to celebrate 10 years as described above.

Today I view myself as a person who grows spiritually and realize helping others I help myself

5. Example of emphasised lower lengths.

forty years old, living with
my wife. I am a westerner,
but I enjoy living in the
East. I like many things that
I see: the museums, the theatre,
the water. I work for

6. Male, 40 years. Strongly changing middle zone.

	PLACES VISITED
D trains. Went	Left watching H. J. soup Date opened while we tried
+ one of	Place to change our clothes Kept the app. on the bus but kept
re size as	Taking flitting glances back Kept saying things to me
the end	in very rapid finish - in a very soft voice
imposed on	Could hardly make anything out. Just mumbled over
letters -	saw. Went back to church. Helped teach negative kids to
sometimes.	
to roof	
and	
- car, door.	

7(a) Writing before the onset of a drinking period.

June of '71 immediately
before 1st drink.

Yellow sheet is from
August '85 just after
3rd anniversary in
Sobriety

7(b) As mentioned in text, shortly after 3rd anniversary of sobriety.

alcohol. There is an interesting experimental work by Tripp, et al. (1959). These psychologists gave a group of non alcoholics and a group of alcoholics gradually increasing quantities of alcohol.

The writing of the non-alcoholics, which had not previously been affected, showed more quickly disruption to their handwriting during intoxication. Whereas the handwriting of the alcoholics, who had previously shown definite disruptions in their handwriting, needed much more alcohol before their handwriting showed any changes.

Deliberately I will show only a few specimens of script during the drinking period, because it is my opinion that the samples before this time are more interesting (and psychologically more productive). Above all we can better explain the basic personality of the alcoholic, especially during the time of recuperation, and thereby make full use of the handwriting analysis of this important area of alcoholism. As usual, handwriting is, perhaps, the only means of establishing the structure of a person before the onset of the illness and watching the development of the recuperation process. But as already mentioned, we need much research work in this area just as in many other areas.

Alcoholics Anonymous had a so called 'Big Book' as its guide and bible. After I had finished my work in so far as it can be finished, Dr. Keehner gave me several quotations from the 'Big Book', some of which gave explanations and others of which lent support to my results.

Although we cannot prove it, we believe that the initial drinking in the drinking career of the alcoholic could be ended very quickly. But the difficulty is that only a few alcoholics have the desire to give up drinking as long as there is time. It is an opinion that the reason why the alcoholic drinks is the desire for freedom and flight, the fulfilment of which is promised by alcohol. Before the onset of alcoholism these people are usually compulsive and very inhibited. Then comes a time when the alcoholic almost without exception is simply incapable of giving up drink without any self-insight. At certain times the alcoholic has no effective mental self-defense against the first drink. His defense must come from a mightier power. Most experts in this field agree that Alcoholics Anonymous has the best results in achieving cures for alcoholics.

As previously mentioned, there exists in the USA a movement which states that alcoholism is an organic disease and that psychic symptoms are secondary. If this is at all true, quotations from the Alcoholics Anonymous book should make the fact clear that alcoholism is not only an organic disease but also at the same time a psychic disease.

Drinking begins because of psychic problems, and to relieve these problems a spiritual help and solution is essential. What has apparently been absent until now is a sufficient understanding of professional people for these psychological problems. The psychological examination in the form of tests or analysis of handwriting is necessary here to illustrate individual differences. Handwriting is

Movement is as much a function as color
Rule - should have $\frac{1}{2}$ people all movement -
must discriminate between people. Average should
be 50%.

8(a) Before the drinking period

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to show through handwriting analysis the dynamic aspects of the disease, and to elucidate psychological factors which will help in writing a comprehensive definition of alcoholism. Hopefully this will lead to more effective treatment.

8(B) After the drinking period. One should note the content of this text.

especially designed for such cases, because there is often material from the time before alcoholism available which can impart very important information. The 'Big Book' describes very clearly, characteristics which we can find in handwriting:

Self-seeking and Ego-dependence which we consider to be the roots of most of the troubles. Driven by forms of self-deception, egoism and sympathy with oneself, we insult our fellow men and they pay us back in kind. They hurt us often apparently with their provocation. But as alcoholics we find without exception that we ourselves have often made decisions in the past which have later resulted in a situation in which we were hurt. We think therefore our difficulties were often the results of our own actions. They originate from within ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of how obstinacy can run wild, although he himself will not believe that.

Above all else, the alcoholic must be rid of his self-dependence. That is absolutely essential because it will kill him. God will help in this situation, and very often there is no other possibility of getting free from this self-dependence except with His help. Many alcoholics have countless moral and philosophical convictions, but they cannot live according to them, no matter how much effort they make. Nor can they make their self-dependence any less by their own strength. They must have God's help to do it.

More so than other people the alcoholic leads a double existence. To a large extent he is an actor. He shows his stage character to the world. He is a person who enjoys being with other people. He likes to enjoy a good reputation, but he knows exactly that he does not deserve it. (All these things are related to the self-image.)

Finally, the wisdom of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous experienced the damage to the Ego of the alcoholic. To balance that out, they recommend a religious life. And this has proved to be successful for the alcoholic. It may not help immediately, but the alcoholic can remain sober by long constant work on himself by following the program laid down by Alcoholics Anonymous. If he then seeks professional help in the form of psychotherapy, he can come to a better understanding of himself and by so doing perhaps he can hasten the process of new self-orientation, that he is more in balance with the other aspects of his personality.

To conclude, I should like to say that I have attempted to analyze characteristic traits of the alcoholic from his handwriting and, by doing so, to open a new field for further research and application of the psychology of handwriting.

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BIOGRAPHY: Thea Stein Lewinson studied scientific graphology before World War II in Berlin under Martha Goldberg. Colleagues she studied with there included Werner Wolff. Thea has practiced graphology in Germany, France and the United States. Formerly Chief of the U.S. Government Handwritng Assessment Section, Thea's research includes work at New York Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence College and the National Institute of Mental Health. With over 65 publications in scientific journals and graphology textbooks in various languages, Thea is a frequent lecturer at International Graphological Congresses, and an Honorary member of the "Berufsverband gepruefter Graphologen/Psychologen, e.V." in Munich, an American representative of "La Societe Francaise de Graphology" in Paris, and a member of the "Schweizerische Graphologische Gesellschaft" in Zurich. One of Thea's most recent works is "Symbolism, Art and Handwriting" based upon her 1985 talk at the International Congress in Graphology in Jerusalem and published in *Experiencing Graphology*, Freund Publishing House, Tel Aviv, 1989.